

Introduction :-

This booklet is intended to provide practitioner with a basic understanding of what inclusion is and what it means to teachers, parents, students, administrators and board of education. The focus is on baseline information for dealing with the delicate balance of teaching disabled and non-disabled children as an integral part of educational development movements. We have compiled the information and materials available from different sources and tried to provide suggest strategies, techniques and possibilities for administrators and teachers to change how they meet the needs of all students. Parents can use this booklet to support their roles as advocates for their children based on accurate information.

This booklet is a small contribution from Sense International (India) to deafblind field.

For easy accessibility of information for people with sensory impairments this booklet is also available in Braille, Tape and Large Print on request.

Inclusion – Understanding Basic concepts

“Inclusive Education” is concerned with removing all barriers to learning, and with the participation of all learners vulnerable to exclusion and marginalization. It is a strategic approach designed to facilitate learning success for all children. It addresses the common goal of decreasing and overcoming all exclusion from the human right to education, at least at the elementary level, an enhancing access, participation and learning success in quality basic education for all”

Inclusion communicates something more than “Integration”. It means people participating in families, schools & classrooms, in work places, and in community life. “Inclusion” implies that people are welcomed and each person reaches out to include another person. Inclusion is different from “letting in” or “adding on”. Inclusion conveys the idea that we appreciate each other, that we see each other’s gifts, that we value being together. Inclusion speaks to the importance of relationships. Other aspects of our work, for example, our learning and teaching skills, abilities, and techniques, are not ends in themselves, but merely avenues to inclusion.

In order to discuss the concept of inclusion, it is first necessary to have a common vocabulary.

Mainstreaming :-

Generally, mainstreaming has been used to refer to the selective placement of special students in one or more "regular" education classes. Theoretically, mainstreaming generally assume that a student must "earn" his or her opportunity to be placed in regular classes by demonstrating an ability to "keep up" with the work assigned by the regular classroom teacher. This concept is closely linked to traditional forms of special education service delivery.

Inclusion :-

Inclusion is an educational Philosophy aimed at “normalizing” special services for which students qualify. Inclusion involves an attempt to provide more of these special services by providing additional aids and support inside the regular classroom, rather than by pulling students out for isolated instruction. Inclusion involves the extension of general education curricula and goals to students receiving special services. Finally, inclusion involves shared responsibility, problem-solving, and mutual support among all the staff members who provide services to students.

When students with disabilities are fully included as members of “age-appropriate education” classrooms in their neighbourhood schools, the meaning of the term *special education* is transformed. Special education becomes not a *placement*, but a *service*, that is provided to students in the context of typical classrooms, schools and communities. As indicated by these markers, there is zero exclusion in a fully inclusive school; students participate in core curriculum and activities that provide the context for meeting individualized education program (IEP) objectives. Students receive supplementary and special education services through regularly planned, collaborative teaming by special and general educators, related service professionals, paraprofessionals, parents, peers and administrators.

Inclusion is a term which expresses commitment to educate each child, to the maximum extent appropriate, in the school and classroom he or she would otherwise attend. It involves bringing the support services to the child rather than moving the child to the services and requires only that the child will benefit from being in the class.

Full Inclusion :-

Full inclusion means that all students, regardless of handicapping condition or severity, will be in a regular classroom/program full time. All services must be taken to the child in that setting.

Inclusion of students who are Deafblind :-

Students who are deafblind represent a heterogeneous group in terms of cognitive and functional capacities. The unique support needs of these students include specialized communication and mobility instruction. The specific condition of deafblindness requires that, in addition to functional curricula that is age appropriate, at least the following be part of the students' IEP:

- Communication goals reflecting the students' most useful modality
- Sensory development activities
- Teaching strategies that consider the students' preferred learning styles.
- Mobility training
- Cognitive skills expansion through adaptation of sensory input
- Increased opportunities for social interaction
- Instruction in reading and writing, if appropriate.

Inclusive education means that all students in a school, regardless of their strengths or weaknesses in any area, become part of the school community. They are included in the feeling of belonging among other students, teachers, and support staff. Schools have a duty to educate children with disabilities in general education classrooms.

* **Integration**

- Focus on disability
- Helping children "fit in to the normal class"
- Regular curriculum with modification and support

* **Inclusion**

- Focus on recognition of difference
- Learner focused
- Flexible curriculum and teacher to meet all students' needs

Planning, organising and delivering inclusive programs :-

- Consider student previous experience/knowledge
- Focus on student learning outcomes rather than be 'rigid' over the content
- Value differences in outcome
- Recognise that student learning outcomes can be demonstrated in novel contexts
- Plan for differing completion speeds
- Plan to provide students with additional help
- Plan to provide extension support for those who need it

What Does An Inclusive Classroom Look Like?

Inclusive classrooms look different all the time because the environment is created by whatever interactions the teacher and students have as a group or as individuals in the group. It's a lot of students doing different things with people helping them, students moving from one environment to another. It's also a classroom where everybody is smiling, the students are actively engaged, and the teacher is delighted to be there.

Students spend a lot of time in learning centres where they make a lot of choices about what they're working on. It's a classroom where learning often happens in small groups with peer helping and supporting each others. It's a classroom with a lot of time for social interaction that means something to curriculum expectations.

It's a classroom that is "student-centred". Students have a high level of responsibility for creating their community. They help structure the rules and are expected to follow them and to meet contracted expectations for curriculum. It's a classroom where students know others will be doing different things and the issue of fairness doesn't come into play because that's just the way it is.

It's a classroom that reaches beyond the classroom and into the community as a resource for learning new skills. *Inclusion without resources, without support, without teacher preparation time, without commitment, without a vision statement, without restructuring, without staff development, won't work.*

The challenges :-

Inclusion remains a controversial concept in education because it relates to educational and social values, as well as to our sense of individual worth.

Any discussion about inclusion should address several important questions:

- Do we value all children equally?
- Is anyone more or less valuable?
- What do we mean by "inclusion"?
- Are there some children for whom "inclusion" is inappropriate?

There are advocates on both sides of the issue. Some view inclusion as a policy driven by an unrealistic expectation that money will be saved. Furthermore, they argue that trying to force all students into the inclusion mould is just as pressurising and discriminatory as trying to force all students into the mould of a special education class or residential institution.

At the other end of the spectrum are those who believe that all students belong in the regular education classroom, and that "good" teachers are those who can meet the needs of all the students, regardless of what those needs may be.

Between the two extremes are large groups of educators and parents who are confused by the concept itself. They wonder whether inclusion is legally required and wonder what is best for children. They also question what it is that schools and school personnel must do to meet the needs of children with disabilities.

What could be done to help parents deal more effectively with inclusive education?

Welcoming parents into a classroom and school is vital to having them be part of the team for inclusive education. Parents of students with disabilities are often the driving force behind the push for inclusive education.

Parent education is the other key to help parents who may question the validity of inclusive education. Some parents may think their children will not make the same academic gains in an inclusive setting as students in a rigorous academic class.

On the other hand, parents of students with disabilities are most concerned that their child will be teased or harmed and not be safe. Parents may support inclusive education when they understand one of its goals is to keep students in their neighbourhood school, a school where siblings may attend. This makes it easier for parents who may be more comfortable becoming part of a school community that they already know. Having students be part of an inclusive setting means that as when those students become parents, they will see inclusion as how education is and not think it is something to fight for.

How can schools work with parents toward inclusive settings?

Schools need to work more with parents. It is always nice to see parents actively involved in their child's education and future. But in some circumstances, parents need to understand that their children with special needs have to be able to generalize what they learn at home and bring that to school and vice versa. For instance, a child who learned to do something independently at school needs the opportunity to be able to do that at home as well.

Educators need to share their perspective with parents. Teachers have watched students go through the whole educational system and there is research and anecdotal evidence for us to know what works and what doesn't work. Educators need to share that information with parents. For instance, we need to be sure that students work on vocational skills for after-school years as well as the academic skills with adaptations."

Every Person has a right to Dignity, Value and Self-Esteem :-

Parents believe that children who are deafblind achieve their fullest potential when they have both the opportunity and the necessary supports to be included with their peers without disabilities across all educational settings. We believe this to be true based on our experiences with our own children; upon the experiences of children and adults who have been with our children; and upon the similar experiences of other people, both parents and professionals. We hold this philosophy to be true for all children and for all people.

We believe that every person has a right to dignity, value, and self-esteem and that those qualities are only fully realized when a person is part of a larger community of people who share similar personal values. We believe that acceptance of differences can be learned, and it is this learning that allows people to feel comfortable with each other when differences are present. These values are developed during childhood, and the educational community plays a fundamental role in the formation of these values.

We believe that the development of relationships within families, between friends, and among community members is an inherent need for all individuals, including those individuals with severe disabilities such as deafblindness. Learning how to form these relationships begins in childhood and is therefore an important outcome of education. We believe that our values as a society are reflected in the way we respond to those who are most often denied opportunities to achieve the very components of personal fulfilment that are accepted as normal and often taken for granted. An inclusive education plan can and should address all of these beliefs, and when it does, society as a whole will benefit.

Inclusion and Educational Curriculum :-

Perhaps the most frequently shared parental concern about inclusion focuses on the educational curriculum. There are a variety of issues in this area. Many parents recognize that, if their child is to function in the world of people without disabilities, they must be taught how to do so. They also recognize that this learning can best occur through exposure to their peers without disabilities. The potential benefits of such exposure and interaction are manifold: the child will learn how to interact with individuals without disabilities, acquire social skills, feel comfortable in typical environments, and have greater opportunities to establish new relationships and a good quality of life.

Yet many families have concerns about the academic side of the child's education: will my child be able to learn as much in a typical classroom as she will in a special education environment? Are there any data that say that children who are included and spend their time in typical classrooms learn as efficiently as they might in a classroom where their program is totally individualized and their pace of learning is geared to their abilities? These parents' concerns spring from the fact that most speakers, writers, and videotapes have focused on the social advantages of inclusion and have not sufficiently addresses the other types of learning that can occur within an inclusive situation.

Related to concerns about academic learning, is the concern often expressed that the general classroom teacher will not be able to individualize the curriculum for the child. Parents recognize that typical educational environments do not generally individualize curricula for general education students and thus pace learning based on the average students' abilities. Therefore, why should parents believe that, because their child has a disability, the typical classroom teacher will be able to individualize curricula for their child?

Some parents, especially those of older children, raise a different type of curricular issue. Because they want their child upon graduation to have the necessary skills to function as effectively as possible, they insist that the child be schooled in a functional or life skills curriculum. They also insist that the child receive community based vocational training during the high school years. Most of these parents recognize that this type of curriculum is not usually taught within the general education program. Therefore, they insist that it be provided in a special environment with teachers qualified to instruct these specific kinds of skills.

Inclusion differs from mainstreaming in that mainstreaming is an educational term that provides disabled students the opportunity to be placed in a regular class based on the students' ability to keep up with work assigned, with some modifications. Instructional support and related services are typically provided outside of the regular education setting. Integration, a term popularized in the 1980s, was used to indicate the placement of a disabled child in a special class, in a typical school, where the student could participate in some activities with non disabled peers. Special education services were usually provided in a special education class. Teachers recommended that disabled students have a consistent classroom environment with little transition. A dual system was then created in which disabled children became a separate entity in the school building, which resulted in further stigmatism and separation from their peers.

Parents of non-disabled students fear that their children would be neglected in the classroom because of the significant needs of disabled students. Schools have limited resources, and many programs have been cut because of a lack of funds. Parents are concerned that if resources in the regular classroom are geared to the disabled students, fewer resources and less support will be available to the non-disabled students.

Determining Goals and Roles of Personnel :-

Educating all students, regardless of disabling condition, in their neighbourhood school is the goal of inclusive education. A strong sense of community in the classroom, throughout the school, and among parents of all students is necessary for an inclusive program. A flexible curriculum and support for staff and students are necessary components of an inclusive model.

Establishing school-based plans for educating children with disabling conditions in the regular classroom setting is a shared responsibility of regular and special educators. Inclusive education requires a restructuring of how services are delivered to children, and a focused effort for “push-in” rather than “pull-out” services is the key. Parents’ awareness of these changes increases the roles of the students, school personnel, and home. This partnership supports a plan for educational change.

Collaboration of regular and special education teachers naturally occurs as children with special needs spend more time in regular education. Consultant services develop into a support system for professionals in the school in order to help students succeed in the classroom. Collaborative efforts should focus on shared concerns that could be worked on in school and at home so that parents are partners in their children’s education. Collaboration is a crucial component for improvement of educational services to students with special needs.

Giving teachers’ control of a classroom, policy, and programs is a useful tool in support of collaboration. Effective education collaboration needs to focus on shared responsibilities, mutual respect, joint planning, reciprocal support, a common educational philosophy, and systemic evaluation and dissemination of information.

Inclusion programmes have been unsuccessful for the following reasons:

- Little or no training for teachers
- Quick, fearful response by schools to outside pressures
- Lack of understanding by parents and professionals of what inclusion should be
- Small initiative for one child by two cooperating teachers with no plans for follow-through for subsequent years
- Lack of government, central office, board of education, and administrative support.

It is important to note that inclusive programs will be and should be different from one another and may vary within and between grades and schools because individual student needs vary. The acknowledgement that these differences are a positive part of a district wise program is significant. Flexibility is a key component to inclusive classrooms.

Teaching strategies for inclusive settings are synonymous with effective teaching strategies used in any area of education. Teachers need to know that they can teach effectively in a supportive school environment. If teachers are supported by colleagues and administrators, they will allow their students flexibility in sharing their knowledge with peers. If teachers do not fear failure when trying new techniques, children will be more willing to try new ways of gaining knowledge.

Reference:

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- 3) Handbook of Inclusive Education for Educators, Administrators and Planners, 2004, Edited by Puri, M. and Abraham, G. Sage Publication, India, New Delhi
- 4) Struggles for Inclusive Education by Anastasia D. Vlachou, published by Open University Press, Buckingham
- 5) Managing Inclusive Education – From policy to experience by Peter Clough, published by Paul Chapman Publishing Limited
- 6) Disability, Human Rights and Education - Cross Cultural Perspective by Felicity Armstrong and Len Barton, published by Open University Press, Buckingham